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The War of 1812

To Great Britain the War of 1812 was simply a burdensome adjunct of its greater struggle against Napoleonic France. To the Canadians it was clearly a case of naked American aggression. But to the Americans it was neither simple nor clear. The United States entered the war with confused objectives and divided loyalties and made peace without settling any of the issues that had induced the nation to go to war.

Origins of the War

The immediate causes of the war were seizure of American ships, insults and injuries to American seamen by the British Navy, and rapid expansion of the American frontier. The British outrages at sea took two distinct forms. One was the seizure and forced sale of merchant ships and their cargoes for allegedly violating the British blockade of Europe. Although France had declared a counterblockade of the British Isles and had seized American ships, England was the chief offender because its Navy had greater command of the seas. The British further outraged the United States by capturing men from American vessels for forced service in the Royal Navy. The pretext for impressment was the search for deserters, who, the British claimed, had taken employment on American vessels.

The reaction in the United States to impressments differed from that aroused by the seizure of ships and cargoes. In the latter case the maritime interests of the eastern seaboard protested vigorously and demanded naval protection, but rather than risk having their highly profitable trade cut off by war with England, they were willing to take an occasional loss of cargo. Impressments, on the other hand, presented no such financial hardship to the ship owners, whatever the consequences for the unfortunate seamen, and the maritime interests tended to minimize it.

To the country at large the seizure of American seamen was much more serious than the loss of a few hogsheads of flour or molasses.

Uniform Coat Worn by a Private of Connecticut Artillery, ca. 1808

When a British naval vessel in June 1807 attacked and disabled the USS *Chesapeake* and impressed several members of the crew, a general wave of indignation rose in which even the maritime interests joined. This was an insult to the flag; and had President Thomas Jefferson chosen to go to war with England, he would have had considerable support. Instead he decided to clamp an embargo on American trade. In New England, scores of prosperous ship owners were ruined and a number of thriving little seaports suffered an economic depression from which few recovered. While the rest of the country remembered the *Chesapeake* affair and stored up resentment against Britain, maritime New England directed its anger at Jefferson and his party.

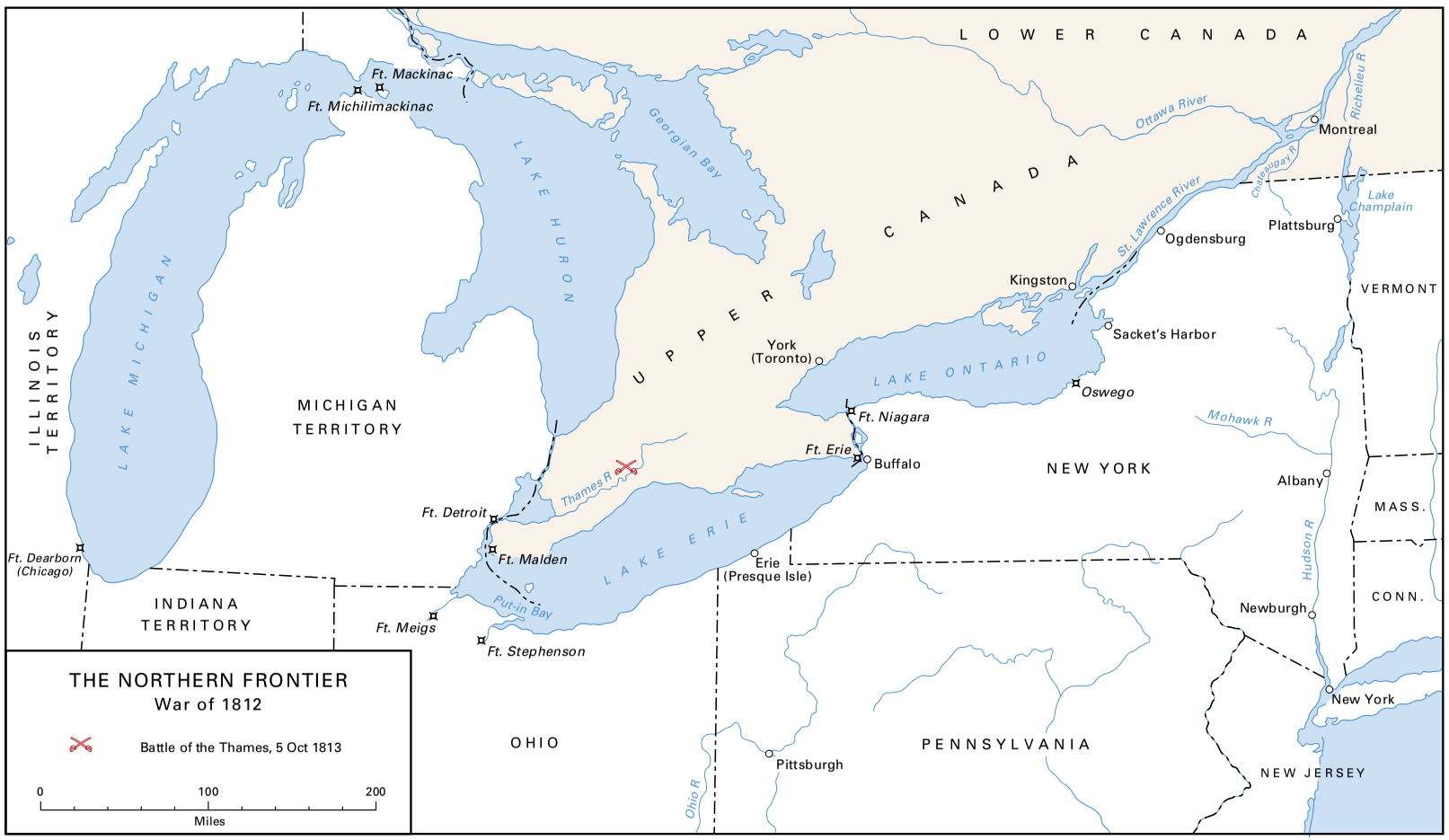
The seat of anti-British fever was in the Northwest and the lower Ohio Valley, where the land-hungry frontiersmen had no doubt that their troubles with the Indians were the result of British intrigue. Stories circulated after every Indian raid of British Army muskets and equipment found on the field. By 1812 the westerners were convinced their problems could best be solved by forcing the British out of Canada and annexing it to the United States.

While the western "war hawks" urged war in the hope of conquering Canada, the people of Georgia, Tennessee, and the Mississippi Territory entertained similar designs against Florida, a Spanish possession. The fact that Spain and England were allies against Napoleon presented the southern war hawks with an excuse for invading Florida. By this time, also, the balance of political power had shifted south and west; ambitious party leaders had no choice but to align themselves with the war hawks, and 1812 was a presidential election year.

President James Madison's use of economic pressure to force England to repeal its blockade almost succeeded. The revival of the Non-Intercourse Act against Britain, prohibiting all trade with England and its colonies, coincided with a poor grain harvest in England and with a growing need for American provisions to supply the British troops fighting the French in Spain. As a result, on June 16, 1812, the British Foreign Minister announced that the blockade on American shipping would be relaxed. Had there been fast trans-Atlantic communications of any kind, war might well have been averted. However, before the news of the British concessions reached him, Madison had sent a message to Congress on June 1 listing all the complaints against England and asking for a declaration of war. Dividing along sectional lines, the House had voted for war on June 4; but the Senate approved only on June 18 and then by only six votes.

The Opposing Forces

At the outbreak of the war, the United States had a total population of about 7.7 million people and was very unprepared for war. A series of border forts garrisoned by very small Regular Army detachments stretched along the Canadian boundary: Fort Mackinac, on the straits between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron; Fort Dearborn, on the site of what is now Chicago; Fort Detroit; and Fort Niagara, at the mouth of the Niagara River on Lake Ontario. (*Map 15*) The actual strength of the Regular Army in June 1812 totaled 11,744 officers and men, including an estimated 5,000 recruits enlisted for the additional force


LOWER CANADA
UPPER CANADA
Ft. Mackinac
Ft. Michilimackinac
Georgian Bay
LAKE HURON
LAKE MICHIGAN
ILLINOIS TERRITORY
MICHIGAN TERRITORY
INDIANA TERRITORY
OHIO
Ottawa River
Richelieu R
Montreal
Chateauguay R
St Lawrence River
Lake Champlain
Plattsburg
Ogdensburg
Kingston
VERMONT
Sacket's Harbor
York (Toronto)
LAKE ONTARIO
Oswego
Ft. Niagara
Mohawk R
Ft. Erie
Buffalo
NEW YORK
Albany
MASS.
Thames R
Ft. Detroit
Ft. Malden
LAKE ERIE
Hudson R
Ft. Dearborn (Chicago)
Erie (Presque Isle)
CONN.
Putin Bay
Ft. Meigs
Ft. Stephenson
Newburgh
New York
THE NORTHERN FRONTIER
War of 1812
Battle of the Thames, 5 Oct 1813
0
100
200
Miles
Pittsburgh
PENNSYLVANIA
NEW JERSEY
Ohio R

Map 15

authorized the preceding January, in contrast to an overall authorized strength of 35,600. The U.S. Navy consisted of 20 vessels: the 3 large 44-gun frigates, 3 smaller frigates of the *Constellation* class rated at 38 guns, and 14 others.

Congress did not lack the will to prepare for war. In March 1812 it had tried to place the Army's supply system on a more adequate footing by establishing a Quartermaster Department on the military staff in place of the inefficient and costly military agent system. At the same time Congress created the Office of the Commissary General of Purchases in the War Department, and for the first time since the Revolution the Army's supply system was placed under the exclusive control of the Secretary of War. In May Congress had made provision for an Ordnance Department responsible for the inspection and testing of all ordnance, cannon balls, shells, and shot; the construction of gun carriages and ammunition wagons; and the preparation and inspection of the "public powder." It enlarged the Corps of Engineers by adding a company of bombardiers, sappers, and miners and expanded and reorganized the Military Academy at West Point. In addition to increasing the Regular Army, Congress had authorized the President to accept volunteer forces and to call upon the states for militia. The difficulty was not planning for an army, but raising one.

One of the world's major powers was ranged against the United States; but on the basis of available resources, the two belligerents were rather evenly matched. Most of Britain's forces were tied up in the war against Napoleon, and for the time being very little military and naval assistance could be spared for the defense of Canada. At the outbreak of the war, there were about 7,000 British and Canadian regulars in Upper and Lower Canada (now the provinces of Ontario and Quebec). With a total white population of only half a million, Canada itself had only a small reservoir of militia to draw upon. When the war began, Maj. Gen. Isaac Brock, the military commander and civil governor of Upper Canada, had 800 militiamen available in addition to his 1,600 regulars. In the course of the war, the two provinces put a total of about 10,000 militiamen in the field; whereas in the United States, probably 450,000 of the militiamen saw active service, though not more than half of them ever got near the front.

Uncle Sam

One of the enduring symbols of America is that of Uncle Sam. His origins are somewhat obscure, but the most convincing story is that he was originally a Troy, New York, meatpacker named Sam Wilson. Sam Wilson was given a contract in 1812 to supply meat for the troops in New York and New Jersey. His firm put the preserved meat in wooden barrels and stamped them "U.S." When the barrels reached the troops, some of whom were apparently from the Troy area, the troops supposedly remarked that the "U.S." must stand for Uncle Sam! Ostensibly from these humble beginnings grew a character in nineteenth century political cartoons of a tall, bearded man dressed in striped pants and wearing a vest and star-spangled hat. James Montgomery Flagg would render this American symbol most powerfully in his 1916–1917 recruiting poster of a stern Uncle Sam pointing a finger at the viewer and stating, "I want you for U.S. Army."

Tecumseh

After Tecumseh's death in battle while leading warriors of his own Shawnee and other tribes during the War of 1812, he became a revered symbol of the noble warrior dying in battle for a cause. Tecumseh had watched Indian lands in the Northwest Territory whittled away by a series of treaties with individual tribes and urged intertribal cooperation to halt the advance of white settlement. Yet his idea of a united Indian front against white expansion never came to pass. Instead, clan and local loyalties prevailed. Tecumseh did not enjoy unanimous backing even from his own tribe, the Shawnees. His program of unity and organization was attractive to the very white people he opposed, for it was just what they would have done; but it ran counter to the customs and traditions of the Indian people he meant to defend and failed to attract them in sufficient numbers.

The support of Indian tribes gave Canada one source of manpower that the United States lacked. After the Battle of Tippecanoe, Tecumseh, the Shawnee chief, had led his warriors across the border into Canada. There, along with the Canadian Indians, they joined the forces opposing the Americans. Perhaps 3,500 Indians were serving in the Canadian forces during the Thames River campaign in the fall of 1813, probably the largest number that took the field at any one time during the war.

The bulk of the British Navy was also fighting in the war against Napoleon. In September 1812, three months after the outbreak of war with the United States, Britain had no more than eleven ships of the line, thirty-four frigates, and about an equal number of smaller naval vessels in the western Atlantic. These were all that could be spared for operations in American waters, which involved the tremendous tasks of escorting British merchant shipping, protecting the St. Lawrence River, blockading American ports, and at the same time hunting down American frigates.

A significant weakness in the American position was the disunity of the country. In the New England states, public opinion ranged from mere apathy to actively expressed opposition to the war. A good many Massachusetts and Connecticut ship owners outfitted privateers (privately owned and armed vessels that were commissioned to take enemy ships), but how much of this was a result of patriotism and how much was hope for profit remains a matter of conjecture. Many New Englanders went so far as to sell grain and provisions to the British. Throughout the war, there were serious problems in raising and sustaining the militia from New England. Nevertheless, several of those states spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on local defense even if they contributed little directly to the federal effort. And despite the regional disaffection with the war, New England was second only to the Mid-Atlantic States in providing regular units: New England raised thirteen regiments of soldiers, whereas New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania combined provided fifteen.

Canada was not faced with the same degree of public opinion challenges. Nevertheless, many inhabitants of Upper Canada were recent immigrants from the United States who had no great desire to take up arms against their former homeland. Other Canadians thought that the

superiority of the United States in men and material made any defense hopeless. That General Brock was able to overcome this spirit of defeatism and obtain the degree of support he needed to defend Canada is a lasting tribute to the quality of his leadership.

The Strategic Pattern

The fundamental military strategy of the United States was simple enough. The primary undertaking would be the conquest of Canada. The United States also planned an immediate naval offensive, whereby a swarm of privateers and the small Navy would be set loose on the high seas to destroy British commerce. The old invasion route into Canada by way of Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River led directly to the most populous and most important part of the enemy's territory. The capture of Montreal would cut the line of communications upon which the British defense of Upper Canada depended, making the fall of that province inevitable. But this invasion route was near the center of disaffection in the United States from which little local support could be expected. The places where enthusiasm for the war ran high and where the Canadian forces were weak offered a safer theater of operations, though one with fewer strategic opportunities. Thus, in violation of the principles of objective and economy of force, the first assaults were delivered across the Detroit River and across the Niagara River between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario rather than along the Hudson–Lake Champlain–Montreal line of advance.

The war progressed through three distinct stages. In the first, lasting until the spring of 1813, England was so hard pressed in Europe that it could spare neither men nor ships in any great number for the conflict in North America. The United States was free to take the initiative, to invade Canada, and to send out cruisers and privateers against enemy shipping. During the second stage, lasting from early 1813 to the beginning of 1814, Britain was able to establish a tight blockade but still could not materially reinforce the troops in Canada. During this stage the American Army, having gained experience, won its first successes. The third stage, in 1814, was marked by the constant arrival in North America of British regulars and naval reinforcements, which enabled the enemy to raid the North American coast almost at will and to take the offensive in several quarters. At the same time, in this final stage of the war American forces fought their best fights and won their most brilliant victories.

This wooden, barrel-type canteen was the Regular Army's most popular model from the Revolutionary War through the early republic.

The First Campaigns

The first blows of the war were struck in the Detroit area and at Fort Mackinac. President Madison gave Brig. Gen. William Hull, Governor of the Michigan Territory, command of operations in that area. Hull arrived at Fort Detroit on July 5, 1812, with a force of about 1,500 Ohio militiamen and 300 regulars, which he led across the river into Canada a week later. (*See Map 15.*) At that time the whole enemy force on the Detroit frontier amounted to about 150 British regulars, 300 Canadian militiamen, and some 250 Indians led by Tecumseh. Most of the enemy forces were at Fort Malden, about twenty miles south of Detroit, on

"Regulars by God"

On July 5, 1814, the 22d U.S. Infantry demonstrated at Chippewa, Canada, that the American republic had fielded a professional army capable of standing up to the British Army on a conventional battlefield. That spring Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott formed the 1st Brigade of regulars, consisting of the 9th, 11th, 22d, and 25th Infantries, near Buffalo, New York. An ardent student of European military training, Scott quickly shaped his brigade into a disciplined force that took the British by surprise when deployed to block a British advance into New York. Deceived by the gray uniforms American militia units usually wore, the British only belatedly realized they had encountered regular troops. The U.S. soldiers steadily advanced toward their opponents, seemingly unperturbed by musket volleys that tore through their ranks, causing the British commanding general to exclaim, "Those are Regulars, by God!" Today the memory of the victory at Chippewa lives on in the tradition of gray uniforms worn by cadets of the Military Academy at West Point and in the unofficial motto, "Regulars by God," of the 6th and 22d Infantries.

the Canadian side of the river. General Hull had been a dashing young officer in the Revolution, but by this time age and its infirmities had made him cautious and timid. Instead of moving directly against Fort Malden, Hull issued a bombastic proclamation to the people of Canada announcing their imminent liberation from "tyranny and oppression"; but he stayed at the river landing almost opposite Detroit. He sent out several small raiding detachments along the Thames and Detroit Rivers, one of which returned after skirmishing with the British outposts near Fort Malden.

In the meantime General Brock, who was both energetic and daring, sent a small party of British regulars, Canadians, and Indians across the river from Malden to cut General Hull's communications with Ohio. By that time Hull was discouraged by the loss of Fort Mackinac, whose sixty defenders had quietly surrendered on July 17 to a small group of British regulars supported by a motley force of fur traders and Indians who at Brock's suggestion had swiftly marched from St. Joseph Island, forty miles to the north. Hull also knew that the enemy in Fort Malden had received reinforcements (which he overestimated tenfold) and feared that Detroit would be completely cut off from its base of supplies. Taking counsel of his fears, on August 7 he began to withdraw his force across the river into Fort Detroit. The last American had scarcely returned before the first men of Brock's force appeared and began setting up artillery opposite Detroit. By August 15 five guns were in position and opened fire on the fort, and the next morning Brock led his troops across the river. Before Brock could launch his assault, the Americans surrendered. Militiamen were released under parole; Hull and the regulars were sent as prisoners to Montreal. Later paroled, Hull returned to face a court-martial for his poor conduct during the campaign, was sentenced to be shot, and was immediately pardoned.

On August 15, the day before the surrender, the small garrison at distant Fort Dearborn, acting on orders from Hull, had evacuated the post and started out for Detroit. The column was almost instantly attacked by a band of Indians who massacred the Americans before returning to destroy the fort.

With the fall of Mackinac, Detroit, and Dearborn, the entire territory north and west of Ohio fell under enemy control. The settlements in Indiana lay open to attack, the neighboring Indian tribes hastened to join the winning side, and the Canadians in the upper province lost some of the spirit of defeatism with which they had entered the war.

Immediately after taking Detroit, Brock transferred most of his troops to the Niagara frontier, where he faced an American invasion force of 6,500 men. Maj. Gen. Stephen van Rensselaer, the senior American commander and a New York militiaman, was camped at Lewiston with a force of 900 regulars and about 2,300 militiamen. Van Rensselaer owed his appointment not to any active military experience, for he had none, but to his family's position in New York. Inexperienced as he was in military art, van Rensselaer at least fought the enemy, which was more than could be said of the Regular Army commander in the theater, Brig. Gen. Alexander Smyth. Smyth and his 1,650 regulars and nearly 400 militiamen were located at Buffalo. The rest of the American force, about 1,300 regulars, was stationed at Fort Niagara.

Van Rensselaer planned to cross the narrow Niagara River and capture Queenston and its heights, a towering escarpment that ran perpendicular to the river south of the town. From this vantage point, he hoped to command the area and eventually drive the British out of the Niagara peninsula. Smyth, on the other hand, wanted to attack above the falls, where the banks were low and the current less swift; and he refused to cooperate with the militia general. With a force ten times that of the British opposite him, van Rensselaer decided to attack alone. After one attempt had been called off for lack of oars for the boats, van Rensselaer finally ordered an attack for the morning of October 13. The assault force numbered 600 men, roughly half of them New York militiamen. The attack did not go well. Several boats drifted beyond the landing area; and the first echelon of troops to land, numbering far fewer than 500, was pinned down for a time on the riverbank below the heights. The men eventually found an unguarded path, clambered to the summit, and, surprising the enemy, overwhelmed his fortified battery and drove him down into Queenston.

With a force ten times that of the British opposite him, van Rensselaer decided to attack alone. . . . The attack did not go well.

Later in the morning the Americans repelled a hastily formed counterattack, during which General Brock was killed. This, however, was the high point of van Rensselaer's fortunes. Although 1,300 men were successfully ferried across the river under persistent British fire from a fortified battery north of town, less than half of them ever reached the American line on the heights. Most of the militiamen refused to cross the river, insisting on their legal right to remain on American soil; and General Smyth ignored van Rensselaer's request for regulars. Meanwhile, British and Canadian reinforcements arrived in Queenston, and Maj. Gen. Roger Sheave, General Brock's successor, began to advance on the American position with a force of 800 troops and 300 Indian skirmishers. Van Rensselaer's men, tired and outnumbered, put up a stiff resistance on the heights but in the end were defeated, with 300 Americans killed or wounded and nearly 1,000 captured.

After the defeat at Queenston, van Rensselaer resigned and was succeeded by the unreliable Smyth, who spent his time composing windy proclamations. Disgusted at being marched down to the river on several occasions only to be marched back to camp again, the new army that

had assembled after the battle of Queenston gradually melted away. The men who remained lost all sense of discipline, and finally at the end of November the volunteers were ordered home and the regulars were sent into winter quarters. General Smyth's request for leave was hastily granted, and three months later his name was quietly dropped from the Army rolls.

Except for minor raids across the frozen St. Lawrence, there was no further fighting along the New York frontier until the following spring. During the Niagara campaign the largest force then under arms, commanded by Maj. Gen. Henry Dearborn, had been held in the neighborhood of Albany, more than two hundred and fifty miles from the scene of operations. Dearborn had a good record in the Revolutionary War and had served as President Jefferson's Secretary of War. Persuaded to accept the command of the northern theater, except for Hull's forces, he was in doubt for some time about the extent of his authority over the Niagara front. When it was clarified, he was reluctant to exercise it. Proposing to move his army, which included seven regiments of regulars with artillery and dragoons, against Montreal in conjunction with a simultaneous operation across the Niagara River, Dearborn was content to wait for his subordinates to make the first move. When van Rensselaer made his attempt against Queenston, Dearborn, still in the vicinity of Albany, showed no sign of marching toward Canada. At the beginning of November he sent a large force north to Plattsburg and announced that he would personally lead the army into Montreal, but most of his force got no farther than the border. When his advance guard was driven back to the village of Champlain by Canadian militiamen and Indians and his Vermont and New York volunteers flatly refused to cross the border, Dearborn quietly turned around and marched back to Plattsburg, where he went into winter quarters.

Henry Dearborn
Charles Willson Peale, 1796

If the land campaigns of 1812 reflected little credit on the Army, the war at sea brought lasting glory to the infant Navy. Until the end of the year the American frigates, brigs of war, and privateers were able to slip in and out of harbors and cruise almost at will; and in this period they won their most brilliant victories. At the same time, American privateers were picking off English merchant vessels by the hundreds. Having need of American foodstuffs, Britain was at first willing to take advantage of New England's opposition to the war by not extending the blockade to the New England coast; but by the beginning of 1814 it was effectively blockading the whole coast and had driven most American naval vessels and privateers off the high seas.

The Second Year, 1813

On land, the objects of the American plan of campaign for 1813 were the recapture of Detroit and an attack on Canada across Lake Ontario. (*See Map 15.*) For the Detroit campaign, Madison picked Brig. Gen. William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indian Territory and hero of Tippecanoe. The difficulties of a winter campaign were tremendous, but the country demanded action. Harrison therefore started north toward Lake Erie at the end of October 1812 with about 6,500 men. In January 1813 a sizable detachment of around 1,000 men pushed on to Frenchtown, a small Canadian outpost on the Rai-

sin River, twenty-six miles south of Detroit. There, the American commander, Brig. Gen. James Winchester, positioned his men, their backs to the river with scant natural protection and their movements severely hampered by deep snow. A slightly larger force of British regulars, militiamen, and Indians under Col. Henry Proctor soundly defeated the Americans, killing over 100 Kentucky riflemen and capturing about 500. The brutal massacre of wounded American prisoners by their Indian guards made "Remember the Raisin" the rallying cry of the Northwestern Army, but any plans for revenge had to be postponed, for Harrison had decided to suspend operations for the winter. He built Forts Meigs and Stephenson and posted his army near the Michigan border at the western end of Lake Erie.

The Ontario campaign was entrusted to General Dearborn, who was ordered to move his army from Plattsburg to Sacket's Harbor, where Commodore Isaac Chauncey had been assembling a fleet. Dearborn was to move across the lake to capture Kingston and destroy the British flotilla there, then proceed to York (now Toronto), the capital of Upper Canada, to capture military stores. Finally, he was to cooperate with a force from Buffalo in seizing the forts on the Canadian side of the Niagara River.

The American strategy was basically sound. The capture of Kingston, the only tenable site for a naval station on the Canadian side of Lake Ontario, would give the United States control of the lake and, by cutting the British lines of communications, frustrate enemy plans for operations in the west. After the fall of Kingston, the operations against York and the Niagara forts would be simple mopping-up exercises. When the time came to move, however, Dearborn and Chauncey, hearing a rumor that the British forces in Kingston had been reinforced, decided to bypass that objective and attack York first. About 1,700 men sailed up Lake Ontario without incident, arriving off York before daybreak on April 27. Dearborn, who was in poor health, turned over the command of the assault to Brig. Gen. Zebulon Pike, the explorer of the Southwest. The landing, about four miles west of the town, was virtually unopposed. The British garrison of 600 men, occupying a fortification about halfway between the town and the landing, was overwhelmed after sharp resistance; but just as the Americans were pushing through the fort toward the town, a powder magazine exploded, killing or disabling many Americans and a number of British soldiers. Among those killed was General Pike. Remnants of the garrison fled toward Kingston, 150 miles to the east. The losses were heavy on both sides—almost 20 percent of Dearborn's forces had been killed or wounded. With General Dearborn incapacitated and General Pike dead, the troops apparently got out of hand. They looted and burned the public buildings and destroyed the provincial records. After holding the town for about a week, they recrossed the lake to Niagara to join an attack against the forts on the Canadian side of the Niagara River.

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Meanwhile, Sacket's Harbor had been almost stripped of troops for the raid on York and for reinforcing the army at Fort Niagara. At Kingston, across the lake, Sir George Prevost, the Governor General of Canada, had assembled a force of 800 British regulars in addition to militia. Taking advantage of the absence of Chauncey's fleet, which was at the other end of the lake, Prevost launched an attack on Sacket's Har-

The Burning of York

American strategy in 1813 focused on cutting Canada in half. An assault force under the direct command of Zebulon Pike landed at York, present-day Toronto, then the capital of Upper Canada. The Americans also hoped to capture two British warships to shift the balance of naval power on Lake Ontario but failed. After occupying the town for three days and carrying away military supplies, the Americans torched many of the town's public buildings. Burning public places was an acceptable form of warfare at the time, and later the British burned Washington, D.C.

bor with his entire force of regulars on the night of May 26. The town was defended by about 400 regulars and approximately 750 militiamen under the command of Brig. Gen. Jacob Brown of the New York militia. Brown posted his men in two lines in front of a fortified battery to cover a possible landing. Coming ashore under heavy fire, the British nevertheless pressed rapidly forward, routed the first line, and pushed the second back into the prepared defenses. There, the Americans held. The British then tried two frontal assaults but were repulsed with heavy losses. While they were re-forming for a third attack, General Brown rallied the militia and sent it toward the rear of the enemy's right flank. This was the turning point. Having suffered serious losses and in danger of being cut off, the British hurriedly withdrew to their ships.

On the same day Prevost sailed against Sacket's Harbor, General Dearborn at the western end of Lake Ontario was invading Canada with an army of 4,000 men. The operation began with a well-executed and stubbornly resisted amphibious assault led by Col. Winfield Scott and Comdr. Oliver Hazard Perry, U.S. Navy, with Chauncey's fleet providing fire support. Outnumbered by more than two to one, the British retreated, abandoning Fort George and Queenston to the Americans. (*See Map 16.*) An immediate pursuit might have sealed the victory; but Dearborn, after occupying Fort George, waited several days and then sent about 2,000 men after the enemy. The detachment advanced to within ten miles of the British and camped for the night with slight regard for security and even less for the enemy's audacity. During the night a force of about 700 British soldiers attacked the camp and thoroughly routed the Americans. Dearborn withdrew his entire army to Fort George. About two weeks later, a 500-man detachment ventured fifteen miles outside the fort and, when attacked, surrendered to a force of British and Indians that was half as large. After these reverses there was no further action of consequence on the Niagara front for the remainder of the year. Dearborn, again incapacitated by illness, resigned his commission in early July. Both armies were hard hit by disease, and the American forces were further reduced by the renewal of the war in the west and by an attempt against Montreal.

Hull's disaster at Detroit in 1812 and Harrison's unsuccessful winter campaign had clearly shown that any offensive action in that quarter depended upon first gaining control of Lake Erie. Commander Perry had been assigned the task of building a fleet and seizing control of the lake. Throughout the spring and summer of 1813, except for the time

Winfield Scott

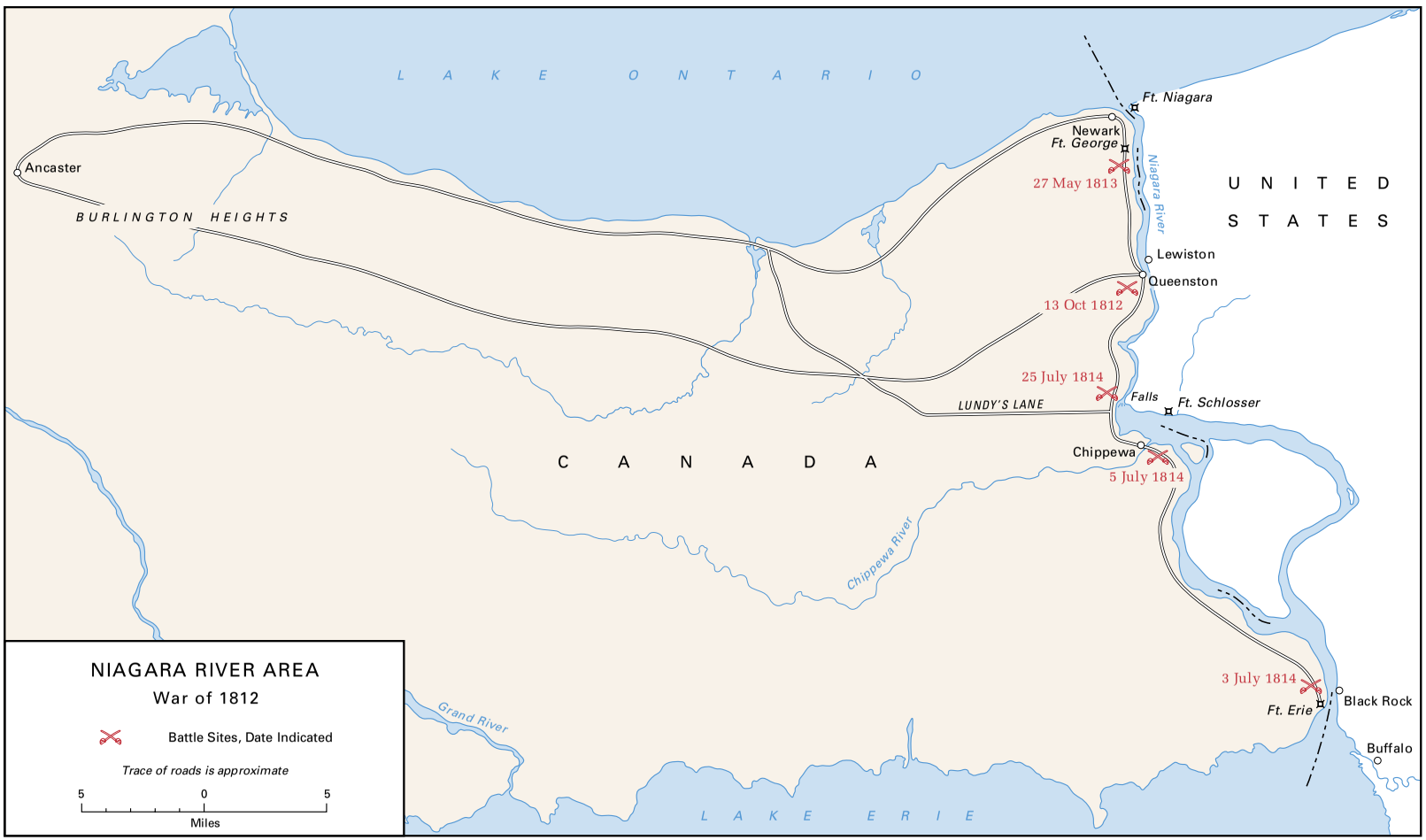
Winfield Scott (1786–1866)

Born to a southern aristocratic family near Petersburg, Virginia, the six-foot-five-inch Scott was commonly referred to as Old Fuss and Feathers because of his attention to detail and elaborate uniforms. Many disliked him personally because of his arrogant demeanor and overt political ambition. While he never received a formal military education, Scott was a voracious reader who studied the great works on military science. He was a dynamic and brave battlefield commander during the War of 1812 and devised a useful drill for his men that trained them well for the fight. Most scholars recognize that Scott was the most gifted and influential military thinker in America from the War of 1812 through the early years of the American Civil War.

he had joined Dearborn's force, the 27-year-old Perry had been busy at Presque Isle assembling his fleet, guns, and crews. By the beginning of August his force was superior to that of the British in every respect except long-range armament. Sailing up the lake, he anchored in Put-in-Bay, near the line still held by General Harrison in the vicinity of Forts Meigs and Stephenson. There, on September 10 Perry met the British Fleet, defeated it, and gained control of Lake Erie.

As soon as the damage to Perry's ships and the captured British vessels had been repaired, Harrison embarked his army and sailed against Fort Malden. A regiment of mounted Kentucky riflemen under Col. Richard M. Johnson moved along the shore of the lake toward Detroit. Vastly outnumbered on land and now open to attack from the water, the British abandoned both Forts Malden and Detroit and retreated eastward. Leaving a detachment to garrison the forts, Harrison set out after the enemy with the Kentucky cavalry regiments, five brigades of Kentucky volunteers, and a part of the 27th Infantry, a force of about 3,500 men. On October 5 he made contact with the British on the banks of the Thames River about eighty-five miles from Malden. (*See Map 15.*) The enemy numbered about 2,900, of whom about 900 were British regulars and the remainder Indians under Tecumseh. Instead of attacking with infantry in the traditional line-against-line fashion, Harrison ordered a mounted attack. The maneuver succeeded completely. Unable to withstand the charging Kentuckians, the British surrendered in droves. The Indians were routed; Tecumseh, who had brought so much trouble to the western frontier, was killed. Among those who distinguished themselves that day was Commander Perry, who rode in the front rank of Johnson's charge.

As a result of the victory, which illustrated successful employment of the principles of offensive and mass and highlighted the importance of combined land-sea operations, Lake Erie became an American lake. The Indian confederacy was shattered. The American position on the Detroit frontier was reestablished, a portion of Canadian territory was brought under American control, and the enemy threat in that sector


L A K E O N T A R I O
Ft. Niagara
Newark
Ft. George
27 May 1813
Niagara River
U N I T E D
S T A T E S
Ancaster
BURLINGTON HEIGHTS
Lewiston
Queenston
13 Oct 1812
25 July 1814
Falls
Ft. Schlosser
LUNDY'S LANE
C A N A D A
Chippewa
5 July 1814
Chippewa River
3 July 1814
Ft. Erie
Black Rock
Buffalo
Grand River
L A K E E R I E
NIAGARA RIVER AREA
War of 1812
Battle Sites, Date Indicated
Trace of roads is approximate
5 0 5
Miles

Map 16

was eliminated. There was no further fighting here for the rest of the war. It was a decisive victory.

The small remnant of the British force that had escaped capture at the Thames—no more than 250 soldiers and a few Indians—made its way overland to the head of Lake Ontario. Harrison, after discharging his Kentucky volunteers and arranging for the defenses of the Michigan Territory, sailed after it with the remainder of his army. He arrived at the Niagara frontier at an opportune time, since the American forces in that theater were being called upon to support a two-pronged drive against Montreal.

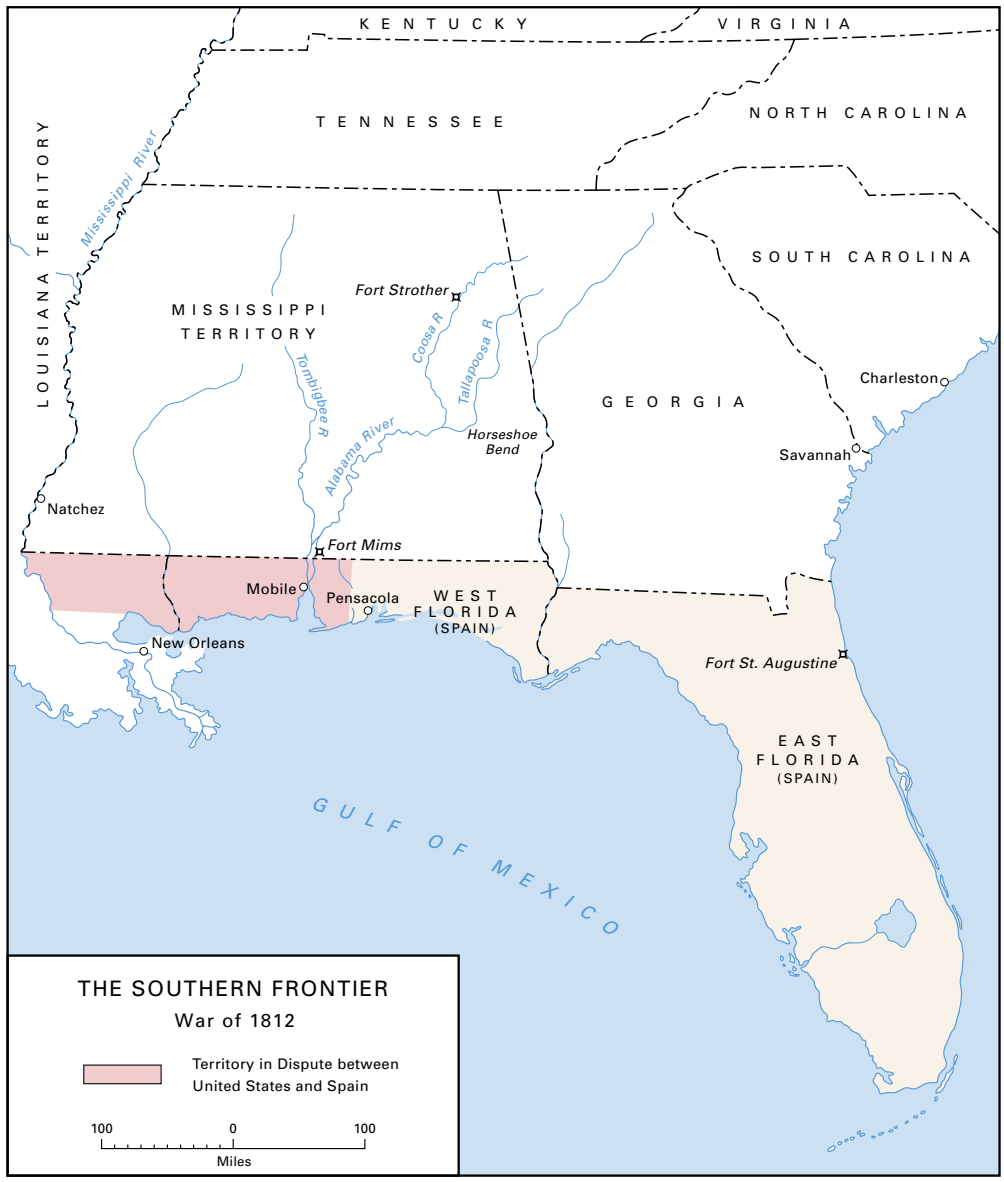
The expedition against Montreal in the fall of 1813 was one of the worst fiascoes of the war.

The expedition against Montreal in the fall of 1813 was one of the worst fiascoes of the war. It involved a simultaneous drive by two forces: one, an army of about 4,000 men assembled at Plattsburg on Lake Champlain under the command of Brig. Gen. Wade Hampton, and another of about 6,000 men under the command of Maj. Gen. James Wilkinson, which was to attack down the St. Lawrence River from Sacket's Harbor. Hampton and Wilkinson were scarcely on speaking terms, and there was no one on the spot to command the two of them. Neither had sufficient strength to capture Montreal without the other's aid; each lacked confidence in the other, and both suspected that the War Department was leaving them in the lurch. At first contact with the British, about halfway down the Chateaugay River, Hampton retreated and, after falling back all the way to Plattsburg, resigned from the Army. Wilkinson, after a detachment of about 2,000 men was severely mauled in an engagement just north of Ogdensburg, also abandoned his part of the operation and followed Hampton into Plattsburg.

In the meantime, during December 1813 the British took advantage of the weakened state of American forces on the Niagara frontier. They recaptured Fort George and crossed the river to take Fort Niagara, which remained in British hands until the end of the war. Before evacuating Fort George, the Americans had burned the town of Newark and part of Queenston. In retaliation the British, after assaulting Fort Niagara with unusual ferocity, loosed their Indian allies on the surrounding countryside and burned the town of Buffalo and the nearby village of Black Rock.

During 1813 a new theater of operations opened in the south. Maj. Gen. (of the Tennessee militia) Andrew Jackson, an ardent expansionist, wrote the Secretary of War that he would "rejoice at the opportunity of placing the American eagle on the ramparts of Mobile, Pensacola, and Fort St. Augustine." (*Map 17*) For this purpose Tennessee had raised a force of 2,000 men to be under Jackson's command. Congress, after much debate, approved only an expedition into that part of the gulf coast in dispute between the United States and Spain and refused to entrust the venture to the Tennesseans. Just before he went north to take part in the Montreal expedition, General Wilkinson led his regulars into the disputed part of West Florida and without meeting any resistance occupied Mobile, while the Tennessee army was left cooling its heels in Natchez.

An Indian uprising in that part of the Mississippi Territory soon to become Alabama saved General Jackson's military career. Inspired by Tecumseh's earlier successes, the Creek Indians took to the warpath in the summer of 1813 with a series of outrages culminating in the mas-



Map 17

sacre of more than 500 men, women, and children at Fort Mims. Jackson, with characteristic energy, reassembled his army, which had been dismissed after Congress rejected its services for an attack on Florida, and moved into the Mississippi Territory. His own energy added to his problems, for he completely outran his primitive supply system and dangerously extended his line of communications. The hardships of the campaign and one near defeat at the hands of the Indians destroyed any enthusiasm the militia might have had for continuing in service. Jackson was compelled to entrench at Fort Strother on the Coosa River and remain there for several months until the arrival of a regiment of the Regular Army gave him the means to deal with the mutinous militia.

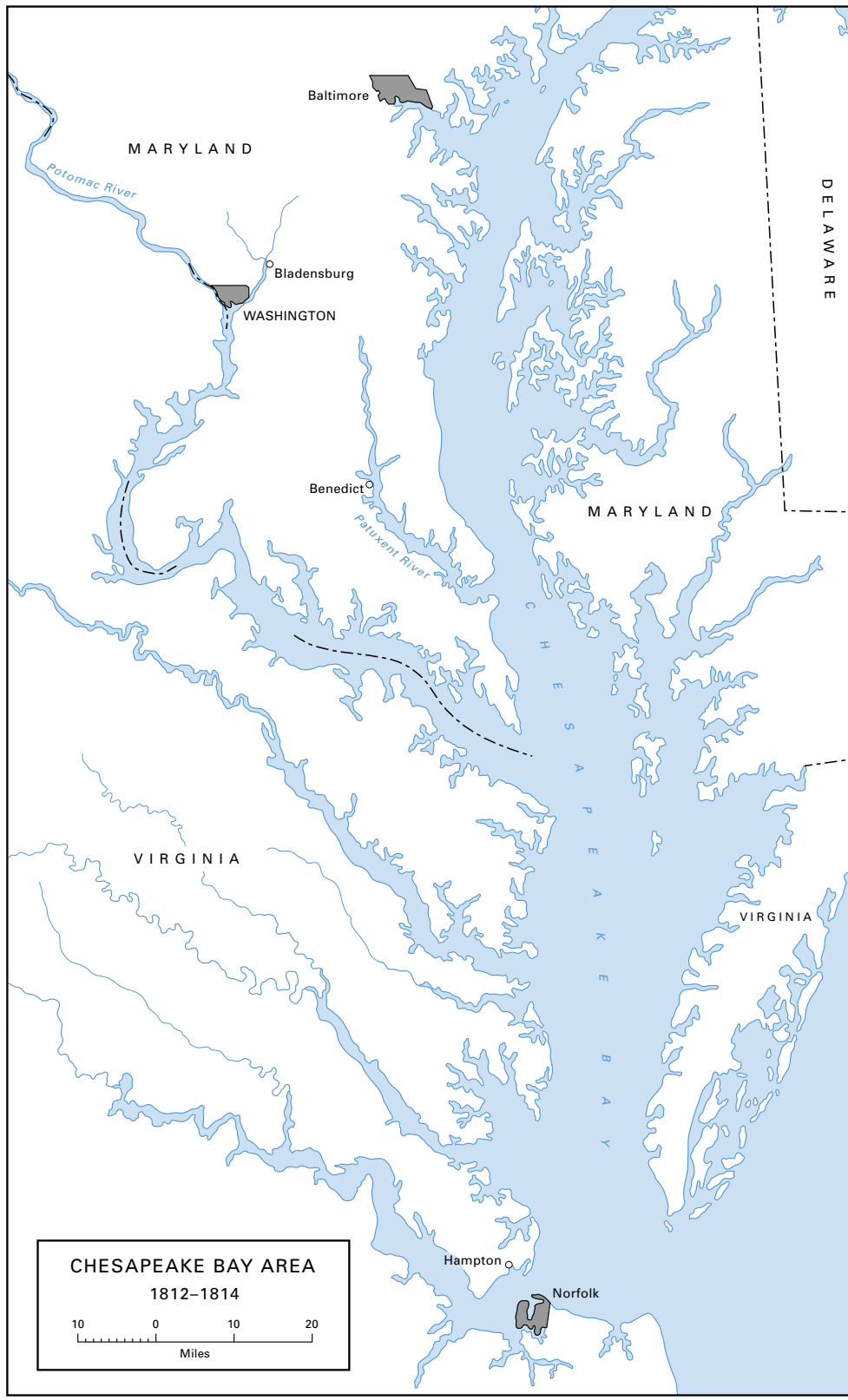
"Old Hickory"

Known as Old Hickory, Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) was said to be as tough as a hickory tree. During his duel with Charles Dickinson in 1806, he broke two of his ribs and a bullet lodged so near his heart that he suffered for his remaining thirty-nine years. A militia general who until 1813 had never led troops in combat, he is best known for his efforts in the Creek War, 1813–1814, and during the War of 1812 in the four battles at New Orleans. Jackson became the seventh U.S. President.

At the end of March 1814 Jackson decided he had sufficient strength for a decisive blow against the Indians, who had gathered a force of about 900 warriors and many women and children in a fortified camp at the Horseshoe Bend of the Tallapoosa River. Jackson had about 2,000 militia and volunteers, nearly 600 regulars, several hundred friendly Indians, and a few pieces of artillery. The attack was completely successful. A bayonet charge led by the regulars routed the Indians, whom Jackson's forces ruthlessly hunted down and killed all but a hundred or so of the warriors. "I lament that two or three women and children were killed by accident," Jackson later reported. The remaining hostile tribes fled into Spanish territory. As one result of the campaign Jackson was appointed a major general in the Regular Army. The campaign against the Creeks had no other effect on the outcome of the war, but for that matter neither had any of the campaigns in the north up to this point.

Fighting also broke out during 1813 along the east coast, where a British fleet blockaded the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, bottling up the American frigates *Constellation* at Norfolk and *Adams* in the Potomac. (*Map 18*) Opposed only by small American gunboats, the British under Admiral Sir John Warren sought "to chastise the Americans into submission" and at the same time to relieve the pressure on Prevost's forces in Canada. With a flotilla that at times numbered fifteen ships, Rear Adm. Sir George Cockburn, Warren's second in command, roamed the Chesapeake during the spring of 1813, burning and looting the prosperous countryside. Reinforced in June by 2,600 regulars, Warren decided to attack Norfolk, its navy yard and the anchored *Constellation* providing the tempting targets. Norfolk's defenses rested chiefly on Craney Island, which guarded the narrow channel of the Elizabeth River. The island had a seven-gun fortification and was manned by 580 regulars and militia in addition to 150 sailors and marines from the *Constellation*. The British planned to land an 800-man force on the mainland and, when low tide permitted, to march onto the island in a flanking movement. As the tide rose, another 500 men would row across the shoals for a frontal assault. On June 22 the landing party debarked four miles northwest of the island, but the flanking move was countered by the highly accurate marksmanship of the *Constellation's* gunners and was forced to pull back. The frontal assault also suffered from well-directed American fire, which sank three barges and threw the rest into confusion. After taking eighty-one casualties, the British sailed off in disorder. The defenders counted no casualties.

Frustrated at Norfolk, Warren crossed the Roads to Hampton, where he overwhelmed the 450 militia defenders and pillaged the town. A por-


Baltimore
MARYLAND
Potomac River
Bladensburg
WASHINGTON
DELAWARE
Benedict
Patuxent River
MARYLAND
CHESAPEAKE BAY
VIRGINIA
VIRGINIA
CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA
1812–1814
10 0 10 20
Miles
Hampton
Norfolk

Map 18

tion of the fleet remained in the bay for the rest of the year, blockading and marauding; but the operation was not an unalloyed success. It failed to cause a diversion of American troops from the northern border and, by strengthening popular resentment (Cockburn was vilified throughout the country), helped unite Americans behind the war effort.

The conduct of the war in 1812 and 1813 revealed deficiencies . . . that would plague the American cause to the end.

The conduct of the war in 1812 and 1813 revealed deficiencies in the administration of the War Department that would plague the American cause to the end. In early 1813 Madison replaced his incompetent Secretary of War William Eustis with John Armstrong, who instituted a reorganization that eventually resulted in the substitution of younger, more aggressive field commanders for the aged veterans of the Revolution. Congress then authorized an expansion of the Army staff to help the Secretary manage the war. In March it re-created the Offices of the Adjutant General, Inspector General, Surgeon, and Apothecary General and assigned eight topographical engineers to the staff.

Competent leadership meant little, however, without sufficient logistical support; and logistics, more than any other factor, determined the nature of the military campaigns of the war. Lack of transportation was a major problem. The United States was fighting a war on widely separated fronts that required moving supplies through a wilderness where roads had to be built for wagons and packhorses. For this reason, ammunition and clothing supplies proved inadequate. General Harrison had to depend on homemade cartridges and clothing from Ohio townsmen for his northwestern campaign, and Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott's regulars would fight at Chippewa in the gray uniforms of the New York militia. Winter found the troops without blankets, inadequately housed, and without forage for their horses. Most important, the subsistence supply failed so completely that field commanders found it necessary to take local food procurement virtually into their own hands.

Transportation difficulties accounted for only part of the problem. The supply system devised in 1812 proved a resounding failure. Congressional intent notwithstanding, the Quartermaster General had never assumed accountability for the money and property administered by his subordinates or administrative control over his deputies in the south and northwest. Moreover, the functions of his office, never clearly defined, overlapped those of the Commissary General. In a vain attempt to unravel the administrative tangle, Congress created the Office of Superintendent General of Military Supplies to keep account of all military stores and reformed the Quartermaster Department, giving the Quartermaster General stricter control over his deputies. In practice, however, the deputies continued to act independently in their own districts.

Both Congress and the War Department overlooked the greatest need for reform as the Army continued to rely on contractors for the collection and delivery of rations for the troops. With no centralized direction for subsistence supply, the inefficient, fraud-racked contract system proved to be one of the gravest hindrances to military operations throughout the war.

The Last Year of the War, 1814

After the setbacks at the end of 1813, a lull descended on the northern frontier. In March 1814 Wilkinson made a foray from Plattsburg

with about 4,000 men and managed to penetrate about eight miles into Canada before 200 British and Canadian troops stopped his advance. It was an even more miserable failure than his attempt of the preceding fall.

In early 1814 Congress increased the Army to 45 infantry regiments, 4 regiments of riflemen, 3 of artillery, 2 of light dragoons, and 1 of light artillery. The number of general officers was fixed at 6 major generals and 16 brigadier generals in addition to the generals created by brevet. Secretary of War Armstrong promoted Jacob Brown, who had been commissioned a brigadier general in the Regular Army after his heroic defense of Sacket's Harbor, to the rank of major general and placed him in command of the Niagara–Lake Ontario theater. He also promoted the youthful George Izard to major general and gave him command of the Lake Champlain frontier. He appointed six new brigadier generals from the most able, but not necessarily most senior, colonels in the Regular Army, among them Winfield Scott, who had distinguished himself at the battle of Queenston Heights and was now placed in command at Buffalo.

British control of Lake Ontario, won by dint of feverish naval construction during the previous winter, obliged the Secretary of War to recommend operations from Buffalo, but disagreement within the President's Cabinet delayed adoption of a plan until June. Expecting Commodore Chauncey's naval force at Sacket's Harbor to be strong enough to challenge the British Fleet, Washington decided upon a coordinated attack on the Niagara peninsula. (*See Map 16.*) Secretary Armstrong instructed General Brown to cross the Niagara River in the vicinity of Fort Erie and, after assaulting the fort, either to move against Fort George and Newark or to seize and hold a bridge over the Chippewa River, as he saw fit.

Brown accordingly crossed the Niagara River on July 3 with his force of 3,500 men, took Fort Erie, and then advanced toward the Chippewa River, sixteen miles away. There, a smaller British force, including 1,500 regulars, had gathered to oppose the Americans. General Brown posted his army in a strong position behind a creek with his right flank resting on the Niagara River and his left protected by a swamp. In front of the American position was an open plain, beyond which flowed the Chippewa River; on the other side of the river were the British.

Brevet Rank

A brevet was a commission or promotion giving an officer in either the regulars or the volunteers a nominal rank higher than the one for which he received a salary. The Continental Congress adopted it during the American Revolution to recognize heroism in combat and long-term meritorious service. Thus, a particular brave captain could be "promoted" to brevet major during a war but would revert to his permanent rank at the end of the war. After 1812 a brevetted officer could receive additional pay only if the President had assigned him a position that required the higher rank. The wholesale dispensation of brevets during the Civil War discredited the system, and Congress abolished it altogether following the War with Spain.

Jacob J. Brown (1775–1828)

After trying his hand at teaching, writing, surveying, and working as a secretary to Alexander Hamilton, Jacob Brown became a prosperous landowner in western New York in the early 1800s. His stature in the community led to his appointment as the local militia commander. When war broke out, Brown made up for his lack of military knowledge with enthusiasm and combativeness. Dubbed the Fighting Quaker because of his religious background, Brown was one of the most successful American commanders of the war. After the war he rose to become the Commanding General of the Army.

Jacob J. Brown
John Wesley Jarvis, 1815

In celebration of Independence Day, General Scott had promised his brigade a grand parade on the plain the next day. On July 5 he formed his troops, numbering about 1,300; but on moving forward discovered British regulars had crossed the river undetected and had lined up on the opposite edge of the plain. Scott ordered his men to charge, and the British advanced to meet them. The two lines approached each other, alternately stopping to fire and then moving forward, closing the gaps torn by musketry and artillery fire. They came together first at the flanks, about sixty or eighty yards apart at the center. At this point the British line crumbled and broke. By the time a second brigade sent forward by General Brown reached the battlefield, the British had withdrawn across the Chippewa River and were retreating toward Ancaster on Lake Ontario. Scott's casualties amounted to 48 killed and 227 wounded; British losses were 137 killed and 304 wounded.

Brown followed the retreating British as far as Queenston, where he halted to await Commodore Chauncey's fleet. After waiting two weeks for Chauncey, who failed to cooperate in the campaign, Brown withdrew to Chippewa. He proposed to strike out to Ancaster by way of a crossroad known as Lundy's Lane, from which he could reach the Burlington Heights at the head of Lake Ontario and at the rear of the British.

Meanwhile, the British had drawn reinforcements from York and Kingston and more troops were on the way from Lower Canada. Sixteen thousand British veterans, fresh from Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington's victories over the French in Europe, had just arrived in Canada, too late to participate in the Niagara campaign but in good time to permit the redeployment of the troops that had been defending the upper St. Lawrence. By the time General Brown decided to pull back from Queenston, the British force at Ancaster amounted to about 2,200 men under General Phineas Riall; another 1,500 British troops were gathered at Fort George and Fort Niagara at the mouth of the Niagara River.

As soon as Brown began his withdrawal, Riall sent forward about 1,000 men along Lundy's Lane, the very route by which General Brown intended to advance against Burlington Heights; another force of more

than 600 British troops moved out from Fort George and followed Brown along the Queenston road; while a third enemy force of about 400 men moved along the American side of the Niagara River from Fort Niagara. Riall's advance force reached the junction of Lundy's Lane and the Queenston road on the night of July 24, the same night Brown reached Chippewa, about three miles distant. Concerned lest the British force on the opposite side of the Niagara cut his line of communications and entirely unaware of Riall's force at Lundy's Lane, General Brown on July 25 ordered Scott to take his brigade back along the road toward Queenston in the hope of drawing back the British force on the other side of the Niagara. In the meantime, that force had crossed the river and joined Riall's men at Lundy's Lane. Scott had not gone far when much to his surprise he discovered himself face-to-face with a strong enemy element.

The ensuing battle, most of which took place after nightfall, was the hardest fought, most stubbornly contested engagement of the war. For two hours Scott attacked and repulsed the counterattacks of the numerically superior British force, which, moreover, had the advantage of position. Then both sides were reinforced. With Brown's whole contingent engaged, the Americans now had a force equal to that of the British, about 2,900. They were able to force back the enemy from his position and capture his artillery. The battle then continued without material advantage to either side until just before midnight, when General Brown ordered the exhausted Americans to fall back to their camp across the Chippewa River. The equally exhausted enemy was unable to follow. Losses on both sides had been heavy, each side incurring about 850 casualties. On the American side, both General Brown and General Scott were severely wounded, Scott so badly that he saw no further service during the war. On the British side, General Riall and his superior, General Drummond, who had arrived with the reinforcements, were wounded. Riall was taken prisoner.

Both sides claimed Lundy's Lane as a victory, with some justification, but Brown's invasion of Canada was halted. Commodore Chauncey, who failed to prevent the British from using Lake Ontario for supply and reinforcements, contributed to the ambiguous outcome. In contrast to the splendid cooperation between Harrison and Perry on Lake Erie, relations between Brown and Chauncey were far from satisfactory. A few days after the Battle of Lundy's Lane the American army withdrew to Fort Erie and held this outpost on Canadian soil until early in November.

Reinforced after Lundy's Lane, the British laid siege to Fort Erie at the beginning of August but were forced to abandon the effort on September 21 after heavy losses. Shortly thereafter General Izard arrived with reinforcements from Plattsburg and pushed forward as far as Chippewa, where the British were strongly entrenched. After a few minor skirmishes, he ceased operations for the winter. The works at Fort Erie were destroyed, and the army withdrew to American soil on November 5.

During the summer of 1814 the British had been able to reinforce Canada and to stage several raids on the American coast. Eastport, Maine, on Passamaquoddy Bay, and Castine, at the mouth of the Penobscot River, were occupied without resistance. This operation was

Battle of Bladensburg, August 24, 1814

Derisively known as the Bladensburg Races due to the unseemly manner in which U.S. troops left the field, the defeat owed more to poor command arrangements than the inexperience of the militia that formed the bulk of American forces. The U.S. commander, Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, was indecisive and exhausted from having to organize the defense of the capital without a staff. His subordinates were often uncooperative, while on the day of the battle he received the unwelcome "help" of Secretary of State James Monroe. Without consulting anyone, Monroe redeployed the army in a most unfortunate manner. Even President Madison wandered onto the field, almost getting himself captured in the process. In the end, the troops could not overcome the disarray of their superiors.

something more than a raid since Eastport lay in disputed territory, and it was no secret that Britain wanted a rectification of the boundary. No such political object was attached to British forays in the region of Chesapeake Bay. (*See Map 18*.)

On August 19 a force of some 4,000 British troops under Maj. Gen. Robert Ross landed on the Patuxent River and marched on Washington. At the Battle of Bladensburg, five days later, under the eyes of President Madison, who had arrived on the scene with a number of civilian officials just before the battle, Ross easily dispersed the 5,000 militia, naval gunners, and regulars hastily gathered together to defend the capital. The British then entered Washington, burned the Capitol Building, the White House, and other public buildings and returned to their ships.

Baltimore was next on the schedule, but that city had been given time to prepare its defenses. A rather formidable line of redoubts covered the land approach; the harbor was guarded by Fort McHenry and blocked by a line of sunken gunboats. On September 13 a spirited engagement fought by Maryland militia, many of whom had run at Bladensburg just two weeks before, delayed the invaders and caused considerable loss, including General Ross, who was killed. When the fleet failed to reduce Fort McHenry, the assault on the city was called off.

The British attacks in the Chesapeake Bay region were both high and low points for the American cause. The destruction of Washington after a humiliating defeat was certainly demoralizing. However, the successful defense of Baltimore, and in particular the stirring events around the defense of Fort McHenry that would be enshrined forever in Francis Scott Key's poem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," had a far-reaching impact on the war and on later American history.

Two days before the attack on Baltimore, the British suffered a much more serious repulse on Lake Champlain. After the departure of General Izard for the Niagara front, Brig. Gen. Alexander Macomb had remained at Plattsburg with a force of about 3,300 men. Supporting this force was a small fleet under Commodore Thomas Macdonough. Across the border in Canada was an army of British veterans of the Napoleonic Wars whom Prevost was to lead down the route Burgoyne had taken thirty-seven years before. Moving slowly up the Richelieu River toward Lake Champlain, Prevost crossed the border and on September

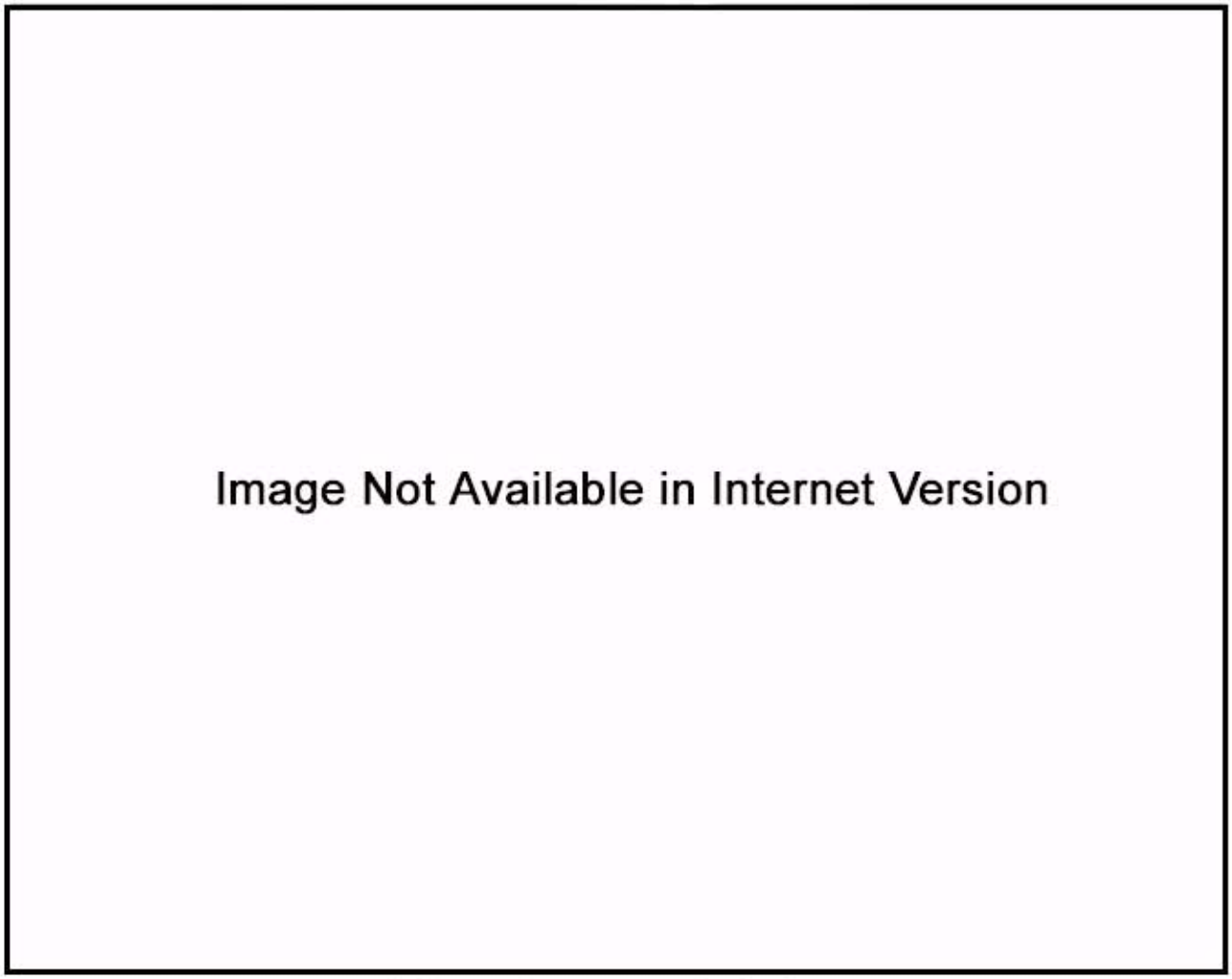
6 arrived before Plattsburg with about 11,000 men. There, he waited for almost a week until his naval support was ready to join the attack. With militia reinforcements, Macomb now had about 4,500 men manning a strong line of redoubts and blockhouses that faced a small river. Macdonough had anchored his vessels in Plattsburg Bay, out of range of British guns but in a position to resist an assault on the American line. On September 11 the British flotilla appeared and Prevost ordered a joint attack. There was no numerical disparity between the naval forces but an important one in the quality of the seamen. Macdonough's ships were manned by well-trained seamen and gunners, the British ships by hastily recruited French-Canadian militia and soldiers with only a sprinkling of regular seamen. As the enemy vessels came into the bay the wind died; and the British were exposed to heavy raking fire from Macdonough's long guns. The British worked their way in and came to anchor; and the two fleets began slugging at each other, broadside by broadside. At the end the British commander was dead and his ships battered into submission. Prevost immediately called off the land attack and withdrew to Canada the next day.

Macdonough's victory ended the gravest threat that had arisen so far. More important, it gave impetus to peace negotiations then under way. News of the two setbacks, Baltimore and Plattsburg, reached England simultaneously, aggravating the war weariness of the British and bolstering the efforts of the American peace commissioners to obtain satisfactory terms.

New Orleans: The Final Battle

The progress of the peace negotiations influenced the British to continue an operation that General Ross, before his repulse and death at Baltimore, had been instructed to carry out: a descent upon the gulf coast to capture New Orleans and possibly sever Louisiana from the United States. (*See Map 17.*) Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Pakenham, one of the Duke of Wellington's distinguished subordinates, was sent to America to take command of the expedition. On Christmas Day, 1814, Pakenham arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi to find his troops disposed on a narrow isthmus below New Orleans between the Mississippi River and a cypress swamp. They had landed two weeks earlier at a shallow lagoon some ten miles east of New Orleans and had already fought one engagement. In this encounter, on December 23, General Jackson, who had taken command of the defenses on December 1, almost succeeded in cutting off a British advance detachment of 2,000, but after a three-hour fight in which casualties on both sides were heavy, he was compelled to retire behind fortifications covering New Orleans.

Opposite the British and behind a ditch stretching from the river to the swamp, Jackson had raised earthworks high enough to require scaling ladders for an assault. About 3,500 men with another 1,000 in reserve manned the defenses. It was a varied group, composed of the 7th and 44th Infantry Regiments, Major Beale's New Orleans Sharpshooters, LaCoste and Daquin's battalions of free African Americans, the Louisiana militia under General David Morgan, a band of Choctaw Indians, the Baratarian pirates, and a motley battalion of fashionably dressed sons and brothers of the New Orleans aristocracy. To support



Battle of New Orleans, *Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte, 1815*

his defenses, Jackson had assembled more than twenty pieces of artillery, including a battery of nine heavy guns on the opposite bank of the Mississippi.

After losing an artillery duel to the Americans on January 1, Pakenham decided on a frontal assault in combination with an attack against the American troops on the west bank. The main assault was to be delivered by about 5,300 men, while about 600 men under Lt. Col. William Thornton were to cross the river and clear the west bank. As the British columns appeared out of the early morning mist on January 8, they were met with murderous fire, first from the artillery, then from the muskets and rifles of Jackson's infantry. Achieving mass through firepower, the Americans mowed the British down by the hundreds. Pakenham and one other general were killed and a third badly wounded. More than 2,000 of the British were casualties; the American losses were trifling.

Suddenly, the battle on the west bank became critical. Jackson did not make adequate preparations to meet the advance there until the

British began their movement, and by then it was too late. The heavy guns of a battery posted on the west bank were not placed to command an attack along that side of the river; and only about 800 militia, divided in two groups a mile apart, were in position to oppose Thornton. The Americans resisted stubbornly, inflicting greater losses than they suffered, but the British pressed on, routed them, and overran the battery. Had the British continued their advance, Jackson's position would have been critical; but Pakenham's successor in command, appalled by the repulse of the main assault, ordered Thornton to withdraw from the west bank and rejoin the main force. For ten days the shattered remnant of Pakenham's army remained in camp unmolested by the Americans, then reembarked and sailed away.

The British appeared off Mobile on February 8, confirming Jackson's fear that they planned an attack in that quarter. They overwhelmed Fort Bowyer, a garrison manned by 360 regulars at the entrance to Mobile Harbor. Before they could attack the city itself, however, word arrived that a treaty had been signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve, two weeks before the Battle of New Orleans. The most lopsided victory of the war, which helped propel Andrew Jackson to the Presidency, had been fought after the war was officially over.

The news of the peace settlement followed so closely on Jackson's triumph in New Orleans that the war as a whole was popularly regarded in the United States as a great victory. Yet, at best, it was a draw. American strategy had centered on the conquest of Canada and the harassment of British shipping. The land campaign had failed miserably, and during most of the war the Navy was bottled up behind a tight British blockade of the North American coast. The initial success of the privateering effort had enriched a few individuals but was no substitute for a robust navy and did little to achieve the war aims. Ironically, the greatest losers in the war were probably the Indians. The Battles of the Thames in the north and Horseshoe Bend in the south dealt them blows from which they never recovered and in the south set the stage for the forcible removal of most members of the tribes of the "Five Civilized Nations" to the west.

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If it favored neither belligerent, the war at least taught the Americans several important lessons. Although the Americans were proud of their reputation as the world's most expert riflemen, the rifle played only a minor role in the war. On the other hand, the American soldier displayed unexpected superiority in gunnery and engineering. Artillery contributed to American successes at Chippewa, Sacket's Harbor, Norfolk, the siege of Fort Erie, and New Orleans. The war also boosted the reputation of the Corps of Engineers, a branch that owed its efficiency chiefly to the Military Academy. Academy graduates completed the fortifications at Fort Erie, built Fort Meigs, planned the harbor defenses of Norfolk and New York, and directed the fortifications at Plattsburg. If larger numbers of infantrymen had been as well trained as the artillerymen and engineers, the course of the war might have been entirely different.

Sea power played a fundamental role in the war; and when combined sea-land operations went well, the resulting campaign was generally successful. In the west, both opponents were handicapped in overland communication, but the British were far more dependent on the

Great Lakes for the movement of troops and supplies for the defense of Upper Canada. In the east, Lake Champlain was strategically important as an invasion corridor to the populous areas of both countries. Just as Perry's victory on Lake Erie decided the outcome of the war in the far west, Macdonough's success on Lake Champlain decided the fate of the British invasion in 1814 and helped influence the peace negotiations.

The much-maligned militia performed, on the whole, as well and as poorly as the Regular Army. The defeats and humiliations of the regular forces during the first years of the war matched those of the militia, just as in a later period the Kentucky volunteers at the Thames and the Maryland militia before Baltimore proved that the state citizen-soldier could perform well. The keys to the militiamen's performance, of course, were training and leadership, the two areas over which the national government had little control. The militia, occasionally competent, was never dependable; though in relationship to the regulars its record was comparable. However, in the nationalistic period that followed the war, when the exploits of the regulars were justly celebrated, an ardent young Secretary of War, John Calhoun, would be able to convince Congress and the nation that the first line of American defense should be a standing army.

Discussion Questions

1. What advantages did the United States have in the War of 1812 that it did not have during the American Revolution? What disadvantages?
2. Discuss why the contractor system of supply failed so miserably.
3. How did the effectiveness of the militiamen and regulars compare in this war?
4. Give some positive and negative examples of leadership during the war of 1812. Did either side adhere to the principle of unity of command? If so, when?
5. What was the tactical significance of the Battles of Lundy's Lane and Chippewa? What effect did the battles have on American and British morale?
6. What were the American strategic objectives of the war? Were they achieved?

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